

Flickers

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](https://archiveofourown.org/works/35137522) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/35137522>.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warnings:	Graphic Depictions Of Violence , No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	Gen
Fandoms:	Minecraft (Video Game) , Dream SMP , Video Blogging RPF
Relationships:	TommyInnit (Video Blogging RPF) & Original Character(s) , TommyInnit (Video Blogging RPF) & Original Male Character(s) , No Romantic Relationship(s)
Characters:	TommyInnit (Video Blogging RPF) , Original Male Character(s) , Original Child Character(s) , Original Characters , Other Character Tags to Be Added
Additional Tags:	Exiled TommyInnit (Video Blogging RPF) , Traumatized TommyInnit (Video Blogging RPF) , Emotional Hurt/Comfort , Blood and Injury , Suicide Attempt , Implied/Referenced Character Death , Implied/Referenced Self-Harm , Character Development , Runaway TommyInnit (Video Blogging RPF) , Selective Mutism , Sign Language , British Sign Language , Panic Attacks , Grief/Mourning , Queerplatonic Relationships , Accidental Baby Acquisition , Self Confidence Issues , Protectiveness , Family Fluff , Happy Ending , Fluff and Angst
Language:	English
Series:	Part 2 of Vibrations AU
Stats:	Published: 2021-11-15 Updated: 2022-02-13 Words: 13,082 Chapters: 4/?

Flickers

by [celestialwarden](#)

Summary

Sean was minding his own business, focused on pulling out a stubborn weed which had wormed its way into his carrot patch when someone basically ran into him.

He narrowly avoided a knee to the face and looked up to see a person with their butt in the dirt and arms to the side for balance.

“Shoot, dude, are you alright?” Sean asked, rubbing his head where a bony limb had made contact— and hard.

The man looked terrified. Wait, were they old enough to be called a man? He was certainly tall enough, but somehow he still had baby fat on his cheeks even though the rest of his body looked like a skeleton’s. His clothes were tattered and dirty, there were fading bruises and burns on the few inches of skin Sean could see, and, jeez, he was still looking at Sean like he was out to pull an axe out and start screaming bloody murder.

Sean winced. “You look like you’ve seen a ghost.”

-

Or, a Vibrations timestamp series from Sean's POV

Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

a penny for your thoughts

Chapter Notes

Hey, so, one, this is a new fic! Yes! I've been planning a few branch-off series for a bit, and I'm in hardcore denial about the main fic ending, so I'm avoiding it with this!

Woohoo! Two, you'll notice this is part of the Vibrations AU series now! Subscribe for more stuff to come very soon :) Three, the main fic will be ending soon, I promise, I just had a shitty weekend with a pretty painful back injury and this is pretty easy to write (unlike the main fic rn lol, there's so much to handle with wrapping up storylines).

ANYWAY

I hope you enjoy, drop a kudos and a comment for this poor, starving college student, and have a lovely day/night/afternoon. <3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Sean huffed, pushing the last chest into place, and flopped on top of it. He'd been moving his stuff all day, and his energy was going down with the sun— fast, and in a blaze of fire.

It was worth it, though, to be able to sleep under a roof he'd bought and on top of a bed he'd made. He'd needed this independence desperately.

His parents had been furious, of course, when Sean first mentioned he wanted to move out. It'd been a little under a year since Penny had died, and everyone's nerves were still a little frayed. It wasn't until they accused him of trying to forget Penny and his grandmother had to step in that Sean realized he couldn't wait for his parents to give him their blessing. He had to leave on his own or not at all.

So, like he always did whenever he didn't know what to do, Sean went to his grandma for help. Eighty-three, battle-worn, and whip-smart, Sean's gram was the best person he'd ever met. There were stories upon stories of life and death stored in her vast memories, and Sean's favorite part of the week was when he stayed at her house after church and got to hear a tale or two.

Sean's gram was a woman of no-nonsense. She also knew her grandson better than anyone, and that included his parents, a fact she was not shy about in the final few months he lived

under their roof— because that’s what it felt like, a roof, certainly not a home. Not without Penny.

She taught Sean how to farm, how to support himself on his own. She taught him how to cook the food he grew, how to sand the trees he cut down, and how to barter the few coins he earned.

Leaving her was the second-hardest thing Sean had ever done.

His gram had scoffed when he suggested staying until she passed.

“If you think it’s a good idea to trade the fundamental years of your young adult life for a couple of my dying ones, I certainly haven’t taught you enough about how to value your services.”

And that was that.

A year, a month, and three days after Penny died, a wandering trader came through the village. Sean left the market with a horse he had acquired just minutes earlier and a very large pack on his back and the saddle. His parents thought he was getting his gram honey for her tea.

Just before he reached the last few houses, a young girl he recognized from Sunday services came running up to him. Sean braced, ready to hop onto the horse he hadn’t had time to name and book it.

Instead, the girl pushed a package into his arms and grinned.

“From the ladies,” she said, and he knew she meant the almost cult-ish group of women, young and old, that gathered at the church for reasons unknown to the men. “Good luck!”

She ran off.

Sean was under the impression that no one but his gran had known about his plan to leave, considering he hadn't told anyone and his gram wasn't one to gossip, but apparently the ladies had been in on it for some time. It made sense— Mrs. Thompson had paid him far too much that time he cleaned her chimney, and he did find coins tucked into his jacket after every service, but...

Well, nothing to do about it now. Sean muttered a slightly bewildered “thanks” to the girl, but she was already gone.

He unwrapped the package carefully, mindful of the delicate brown paper and blue ribbon. With a final pull on the knot, it unraveled.

Sean held in his hands the most beautiful thing he'd ever seen. It was a quilt, obviously handsewn by the ladies. He could almost feel the love tucked into every stitch in every panel.

The quilt in its entirety was a mix of two colors, blue and orange, mixed together in a swirl of rectangular blocks. Sean unfurled it and gasped.

That wasn't orange, it was *copper*. The ladies must have gotten copper from somewhere and managed to thread it into the fabric, because it was positively shining in the light of the lowering sun. In fact, it reminded him of a sunset. Burnished copper over his favorite shades of blue, the ones that his gram said were the color of the ocean.

Sean flipped the quilt over. The back was a neutral blue, calm and consistent, except for a white square at the edge. He bunched the fabric up so the square was in his hands, and— oh, there was writing!

The patch was embroidered with two simple circles, one inside the other. Inside the first ring was written *The Church on Bethel Rock* in gold. The inner circle held Sean's full name, and the church's slogan: *deeper in faith, wider in love*.

Below everything, and embroidered in a simple black thread,

From Your Church Family

A quilt like this would take months to make, even with multiple helping hands. Sean wondered how long his gram had taken to prepare this.

Sean was just a few meters away from the last house, still gazing at the beautiful artwork that was somehow *made for him* , when it hit him.

Copper. *Penny*.

Sean grinned, a little pinched at the ends because he never could keep himself from crying, even at the happy things. He tucked the quilt back into the wrapping paper and walked past the border of the village, one step further than he'd ever been in his life.

And now he was here, in a small village not unlike his own, but a difficult and long ride from where he started. He would send a letter to his gram to let her know where, just in case, but for now, he was absolutely free.

The villagers were quick to point him to a house close to the farms but not quite on the edge of the village. Apparently it was just two rooms, and the current occupants just had their fourth child and were looking to move out. Sean offered them a price his gram would have scoffed at and called him soft for, but he had plenty of extra coins, and the family looked like they didn't.

Sean stayed at the two-room inn that night after helping the family pack their things. The next morning, they were gone right at sunrise and Sean had a house.

A few villagers offered to help Sean move his things in, but he refused. They all seemed to understand that he needed to do this on his own and left him be. It didn't keep the local baker,

Isla, her name was, from bringing him a glass of cold juice and a warm slice of pumpkin bread before sundown.

He had managed to dump out everything in his overflowing inventory and two bags in just a few hours. The furniture made its way to its proper spots, the items to theirs, and the few decorations to the walls. His horse was in a stall at the stable in the village center with plenty of hay.

It felt good. It felt *really* good.

Sean theoretically knew he was capable of living on his own— he'd always been quite pragmatic, even from a young age, but there was a difference between theory and reality.

He was on his own, and he relished it.

But, at the end of the day, he took a carefully wrapped package out of his inventory, undid the ribbon, and laid it out on his bed.

Sean slipped under the quilt and tucked himself in.

Chapter End Notes

Okay so my end notes got deleted somehow??? idk when that happened but i have entirely forgotten what i wrote here anyway

The quilt ladies are actually a real group in my church! Every kid that goes off to college or the military gets a handmade quilt made with their school colors and a patch with the church's name and motto, there's a whole ceremony during a service (which i literally sobbed at). Sometimes i remember that someone made it for me and i just tear up all over again lmao. I would not leave a burning building without that thing. The point is, the cool quilting ladies are real and just as cool as they are in the fic!!

tomorrow clears away the cobwebs

Chapter Summary

Sean was minding his own business, focused on pulling out a stubborn weed which had wormed its way into his carrot patch when someone basically ran into him.

He narrowly avoided a knee to the face and looked up to see a person with their butt in the dirt and arms to the side for balance.

“Shoot, dude, are you alright?” Sean asked, rubbing his head where a bony limb had made contact— and hard.

The man looked terrified. Wait, were they old enough to be called a man? He was certainly tall enough, but somehow he still had baby fat on his cheeks even though the rest of his body looked like a skeleton’s. His clothes were tattered and dirty, there were fading bruises and burns on the few inches of skin Sean could see, and, jeez, he was still looking at Sean like he was out to pull an axe out and start screaming bloody murder.

Sean winced. “You look like you’ve seen a ghost.”

Chapter Notes

IM BACK BABY

Chapter title from Tomorrow in Annie

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Sean was minding his own business, focused on pulling out a stubborn weed which had wormed its way into his carrot patch when someone basically ran into him.

He narrowly avoided a knee to the face and looked up to see a person with their butt in the dirt and arms to the side for balance.

“Shoot, dude, are you alright?” Sean asked, rubbing his head where a bony limb had made contact— and hard.

The man looked terrified. Wait, were they old enough to be called a man? He was certainly tall enough, but somehow he still had baby fat on his cheeks even though the rest of his body looked like a skeleton's. His clothes were tattered and dirty, there were fading bruises and burns on the few inches of skin Sean could see, and, jeez, he was still looking at Sean like he was about to pull an axe out and start screaming bloody murder.

Sean winced. "You look like you've seen a ghost."

The guy opened his mouth but didn't say anything. Sean resisted the urge to push his chin up to close his mouth like he always did with Penny.

"Genuinely, are you okay? You've gone all pale?"

Sean's voice seemed to rouse him out of whatever day-mare he was having, but the stranger kept quiet even as he got to his feet. Sean knew he was staring, but every time he tried to look away his eyes caught on a new bruise or bleeding cut.

The guy picked up a bushel of carrots that Sean had just harvested and pulled an emerald out of his inventory, offering it to Sean. He did it all silently.

Oh. *Oh.*

So the stranger couldn't speak and might even be deaf. Sean laughed a little in his head; for all the people for this beat-up kid to run into, he was oddly prepared for this situation.

The guy hadn't taken enough carrots to equate an emerald, so Sean picked out a few more and placed them on top of the small pile in the stranger's arms. It looked a little more than twenty, but Sean wasn't about to haggle this guy. He definitely needed the food.

Sean gestured to the carrot field and held up two fingers, hoping he got his point across. His sign language was a little rusty, considering he hadn't had anyone to use it with in over a year.

The guy nodded, so Sean put another batch of carrots into a bag, held it out for the guy to put the rest in, and took the second emerald.

"Thank you," he signed.

The stranger paused but echoed the sign back. It wasn't the proper usage in the dialect Sean knew, but Penny had met some kids at the school she went to who did the same thing— one sign for thank you and you're welcome.

Well, apparently there was someone else in town who knew sign language, even if that was probably the last time Sean would see him.

Sean resumed his farming but watched the guy leave out of the corner of his eye.

Hmm.

-

Okay, so Sean was a little wrong.

Almost three weeks later— long enough that the stranger was a distant memory— Sean spotted him wandering near the village fountain.

"Hey, good to see you again!" Sean called, still unaware if the stranger could hear him.

Turns out he could, because the guy flinched and turned around. Whoops.

Thankfully, he hadn't seemed to frighten him too bad, because the stranger waved to Sean.

As Sean approached, it was easy to see that the guy was still just as dirty. His face was streaked brown and green, and his clothes were still tattered. But, the sun was shining, and the stranger got close enough for Sean to get a proper look at him. Now, it was easy to tell that the stranger was definitely younger than him. Even with his height, there was no way he was any older than sixteen— unless the malnutrition made him look younger than he was.

It wasn't a pleasant thought, but Sean still smiled, because here was a kid not far from his own age who knew sign language and seemed to be sticking around. He wasn't... lonely, exactly, but he was excited at the prospect of a friend.

So, it was real excitement when Sean smiled and offered, "You can tag along while I drop off these at my house if you'd like."

The guy paused, and if Sean hadn't been looking closely he would have missed the way their eyes skated across Sean's figure as if looking for something.

He seemed nervous— well, the stranger always seemed nervous, but more than usual this time— so Sean tried to make him feel a bit more comfortable.

"It's just a suggestion, no pressure, but I could use some company." He smiled lightly.

The stranger nodded.

Sean chose to ignore how oddly happy that made him and let his smile slide into a grin. "Great! If you don't mind holding a basket, I can at least use one of my hands," he said, handing them a basket.

He shook off the metaphorical dust in the part of his brain that remembered sign language and lifted his one hand. It wasn't exactly easy to sign with half the pieces missing, but Penny was an over-active kid, and Sean had gotten used to having his hands full.

"My name is Sean, by the way," he said, signing the words as well, "I can't sign much, sorry, but if you don't want me to talk, I can try."

Sean hadn't actually met anyone that was mute and not deaf, so it felt a bit like walking into an unlit cave without a torch— blindly flailing around and hoping you didn't whack anything that blew up.

The dude raised an eyebrow and Sean felt his stomach drop.

"Uh, you're looking at me like I'm crazy. Are you confused about something?"

He pointed at Sean's hands and now Sean was just more confused. Did he know ASL instead? Why not just say so?

"My hand? Oh, are you confused about the signing?"

The kid nodded.

Sean froze, a horrible thought coming to mind.

"Do you not know sign language?" he asked, hoping that the stranger would just lift their hands and sign a simple "*no*".

Alas, Sean's life was never that simple.

They shook their head, and Sean tried his best to compartmentalize the outrageous amount of feelings and questions he had swirling around in his head. One at a time.

“I’m sorry, mate, I thought you did,” Sean said, “You aren’t deaf, right?”

Again, they shook their head, which just gave Sean *more* questions, but the guy was obviously paranoid and the last thing Sean wanted to do was scare him off.

“Do you want to learn?” Sean asked. When the stranger just looked confused, he added, “I can teach you how to speak with your hands.”

For the first time since they met, Sean saw some hint of emotion on the dude’s face that wasn’t confusion or fear. A slight quirk at the corner of his mouth— it wasn’t quite a smile, but Sean would take it. The dude shrugged, but Sean could tell it was a yes.

Sean was... oddly excited about this. He attempted to teach his parents sign language when Penny and he were first learning, but he wasn’t experienced enough, and they never picked it up. Other than that, Penny was the only person he spoke to using sign language.

Besides, the stranger was intriguing, and Sean wanted someone to hang out with when the hours and hours of farming got so boring he felt like boiling his brain.

So, he lifted his hands and introduced himself properly.

-

Sean wasn’t lonely.

He wasn’t, honestly!

He'd been an introvert his whole life, Sean could go days without speaking to someone and he'd be perfectly fine.

But he'd always had someone by his side, hadn't he? Whether it was Penny or his gram, Sean had someone to fall back on. He didn't have that anymore.

Sure, the other villagers were nice, but most of them were either parents or kids, and Sean just... couldn't relate. And he wasn't about to go find a random child just to fit in.

But the stranger who he'd come to think of as Glare— a great joke, in Sean's opinion, because the dude was always showing up with leaves in his hair and acted just as scared as his namesake mob, and because he was constantly shooting scathing looks at Sean— was surprisingly good company.

Glare had quite the collection of expressions which Sean figured came from a life of relying on his body language to speak for him. His face when he pulled the carrot out and landed on his butt— man, Sean was still laughing hours later.

And socializing wasn't always about talking. Sean had learned that well with Penny. On rainy days when their parents wouldn't let them outside, Penny would barge into Sean's room, throw herself on his bed with a dramatic sigh, and grab whatever book he was reading out of his hands. Sean would pretend to be mad but grab a new book and settle himself into the old armchair in the corner, and they wouldn't speak, just read. They had an unspoken system.

Glare was the same. Even while he was deep in work, Sean liked being by his side, farming alongside him. He enjoyed it.

Sean enjoyed it so much, he was upset when Glare didn't come back the next day. Which, of course he didn't, it took the dude almost three weeks to show up for the second time. Sean needed to be patient.

He wasn't lonely, he just enjoyed Glare's company.

-

Four days later, Glare showed up again. He was making his way across the plains that bordered the river and the spruce forest. Sean had no idea if Glare had a house in there somewhere or if he was traveling from another village, but he wasn't about to ask and scare Glare away.

"Hello!" Sean called, waving like a goofy madman. Hey, at least he was self-aware, right?

Glare waved back, a little startled, but he was smiling just slightly. Sean felt a little gooey inside, and no matter how hard he tried, he couldn't stop grinning.

"Do you think you could help me? I can't get this carrot out of the ground." Sean pouted, putting on a fake frown, "I've been *toiling* over this field in the brutally hot January sun for so long that I think my fingers have simply forgotten how to work."

Glare rolled his eyes, and, well, *glared* at Sean, but he could tell from Glare's relaxed posture that it was all a joke.

Sean flopped onto his back. "Oh, woe is me, how will I *ever* harvest my crops and feed my seven young daughters through the winter?"

All Sean could see were Glare's feet as he approached the field, leaned down and yanked the carrot out, walked over to Sean, and tossed it on his face.

"Hey!" Sean spluttered, trying to get dirt out of his mouth, "Not all of us like having dirt on our face!"

He sat up, shaking his hair out, but paused once he noticed Glare looking at him oddly.

Sean raised an eyebrow. "Yes?"

Glare lifted his finger to the air and carefully traced out four symbols. “*A L L ?*”

“All? Oh, it was a joke, cause you’ve got dirt all over you, you know?”

Glare frowned and rubbed at his face. When he looked at his palm, it had patches of mud on it.

“*Oh,*” Glare mouthed.

“Do— I...” Sean trailed off. What do you say to someone who was covered head to toe in all the things that litter the forest floor but wasn’t aware of it?

Glare brushed his hands off and set off the way he came.

Sean scrambled to his feet, suddenly very confused and sort of sad, because Glare was leaving and he didn’t know why.

Until Glare paused, looked back, and gestured to Sean to follow like he was an idiot for not understanding earlier.

Sean ran after him, and it only took a minute for them to reach the river. Glare was smiling, excitement flashing in his eyes like sparks, and it was contagious. Sean was not a spontaneous person, but the water looked deliciously cool, and—

Glare looked the happiest Sean had ever seen.

Sean tossed his shoes and shirt off and ran towards the bank, whooping and hollering. Glare was on his heels, not even bothering to take anything off, just running straight in.

The river was almost icy cold. It was probably runoff from the mountains, where the weather actually got cold enough for snow. Sean hissed when the water hit his thighs, but Glare kept going like he didn't feel a thing.

“Hey, wait up!”

Glare turned back just for a second to shoot Sean a shit-eating grin before continuing to run in.

Penny would've loved him.

The thought hit Sean like a ravager, hard, fast, and merciless.

Immediately, he felt grief. Grief that Penny never got to do stuff like this without their parents breathing down her neck, grief that she never made friends like this. Next, he felt guilt. Because they're so similar, those two with their energizing recklessness and endearing grumpiness, and Sean knows he's comparing them.

He wasn't about to drag some kid into his mess because he misses his sister.

But then a tidal wave of water smacked him in the face, and once he was done coughing enough to open his eyes, Glare had his hands in the water poised for another strike.

Sean narrowed his eyes.

“Oh, it's *so* on.”

The days that Glare came by were Sean's favorites. It seemed like Glare had no rhyme or reason for when he showed up, except for the fact that it was happening more and more often, so Sean spent a good amount of his time side-eying the hill that Glare always came over.

Some days left him disappointed. He would watch the sun rise and set and feel like the day hadn't even existed, and he would go to bed hoping that the next one was different.

The other days left him elated.

Sean was smart enough to admit to himself that, okay, yes, he was definitely lonely before Glare showed up. Just because he was an introvert didn't mean he could just cut people out of his life, *dummy*. Sean could feel Glare rolling their eyes at him. It was amazing how much spite and judgment a person could cram into their expression, honestly.

Today was one of those days.

Sean was taking Glare on a tour through the village, introducing them to all of his favorite people and just generally rambling on about anything and everything. Glare seemed to like it when he talked, and Sean was pretty much an open book, so they made a good pair.

A few of the villagers had asked about Glare a few days ago, coming to Sean because he apparently knew the most about the guy. Considering Sean didn't even know their real name, the bar was pretty low.

All Sean did was warn them that if they commented on the fact Glare couldn't talk, the prices of carrots would magically soar the next day. Sean had been a very polite neighbor and was never really insistent on anything since moving to the village, so no one complained. He just hoped the word had spread enough.

Their first stop was Sean's favorite: Isla's bakery.

Sean pushed the door open, smiling with the tinkling of a bell and holding the door open for Glare.

Glare ducked his head in and blinked to adjust his eyes to the low light. Isla liked to keep her bakery cozy and dim, and it was a big difference from the noon sun.

“Hi Isla!” Sean called.

Isla, who was leaning over an oven a moment ago, straightened her back and smiled.

“Hello Sean! Not back for more cinnamon rolls, are you?”

Sean laughed. “If I had eaten those already you’d be able to see them in my stomach.” It was an exaggeration, but Isla had *definitely* given him way too many for just one person.

“Guess you’ll just have to share them then,” Isla said, mischief flickering in her smile.

Ah, so she’d done that on purpose.

Glare was looking around the bakery, completely unaware of their conversation. He was currently looking at the ceilings, for what, Sean had no idea. Glare was... odd sometimes. Sean couldn’t put his finger on it, but it felt like he was a person visiting a foreign country they hadn’t been expecting to end up in. Lost, scared, and confused, but still curious.

“This is Isla,” Sean said, gesturing towards the woman, “she makes the best bread I’ve ever tasted.”

Glare nodded his head in greeting, fingers fidgeting with the edge of his shirt. He didn’t get any closer to the counter, instead choosing to stay near the door.

Isla kept smiling. That's why Sean liked her, she was a rock in unsteady situations, never faltering where most might.

"Do you want anything? It's free for first time customers," Isla offered.

Sean kept himself from snorting or raising an eyebrow, because that certainly wasn't a discount when those travelers came through the other day. She just had a sweet tooth for this kid already. He couldn't fault her though.

Glare shook his head.

"Are you sure?"

He nodded.

Sean was a little disappointed, sure. He didn't know how anyone could turn down free food, especially when the bakery smelled this good, but maybe Glare just wasn't hungry, or he wasn't a sweets guy. Some people couldn't eat bread, right? Maybe that was it.

Sean was deep in his pointless wondering when Isla set something down on the counter. There were two cupcakes, one chocolate and one vanilla.

Isla pushed them towards Sean and Glare. "Something for the road then?"

Sean plucked his off the counter, grinning. "You're the best, Isla." When Glare made no movement to come closer, Sean grabbed theirs for them.

"Everyone loved the carrot cake last week, by the way," Isla said, "it would be such a nice surprise if I could make more..."

Sean laughed as he pulled the door open. “Sure, I’ll drop off a few bundles tomorrow. See you later!”

“Have a good day, both of you!” Isla called.

Glare followed Sean out of the bakery.

“Isla’s the best,” Sean said, “if you’re ever in a bit of a pinch for money, she’ll spot you, no problem. No one is starving on Isla’s watch, trust me. Oh, that’s a good sign to teach you!”

Glare paused, tilting his head.

“Trust!” Sean lifted his hands. He was surprised he even remembered that sign, but it was one that his parents had wanted Penny to learn fairly early. The experts at the school said it was important for her to learn signs with multiple meanings to expand her vocabulary as fast as possible.

Trust could mean a lot of things. It was a verb and a noun, and a strong one at that.

“Hold out your non-dominant hand out— yeah, your left—” Sean demonstrated his instructions as Glare followed. “Keep it flat, just like that, and then you wanna bring your other hand down quick, like *that*.” Sean held his other hand vertical, thumb at the bottom and pinkie at the top, all the fingers held straight, and moved it downwards so it hit his other hand.

Glare copied the motion, almost perfect.

“Yeah, just make it a bit snappier. Like a knife on a cutting board, you know?”

Glare nodded, their brows furrowed in concentration as he repeated the sign a few more times.

Sean grinned. “That’s it! Simple as that.”

“Thank you,” Glare said.

“Anytime. Where to next?”

Glare shrugged.

“How does the library sound? I’m not sure if they have anything on sign language, but I’m sure you can find something you’ll enjoy no matter what.”

Glare shrugged again.

Sean started down the road. “Follow me, then.”

It wasn’t a long walk to the library, just past a few houses and shops, through the town square, and down a side road. However, Sean didn’t take into account the gaggle of children that liked to mess with whoever passed by.

They jumped out from behind a barrel beside the inn and rushed Glare. Sean whipped around, trying to think of a way to warn him without alarming him, but it was too late. One of the kids— Wyatt, it looked like— latched onto Glare.

Glare, who Sean knew was pretty jumpy, kneed the kid straight in the face.

Glare froze. None of the kids seemed to notice except for Wyatt who laughed it off and scooped a few coins out of Glare’s pocket. A couple of the braver ones joined him, including Jill who was notorious for using people as jungle gyms and— oh, yup, there she went.

Jill was scaling Glare and sitting on his shoulders before it looked like Glare even noticed. To be fair, he looked a bit spaced out. Sean didn't blame him, it could be a little unsettling to be attacked by a small army of grabby children.

"Jill, Wyatt, Lilah, leave him alone," Sean chided, shooing most of them away. Jill just wrapped her arms loosely around Glare's neck and gave him a big grin, missing teeth and all.

Sean rolled his eyes. "Are you alright, dude?" he asked, addressing Glare.

No response.

"Jill, can you hop off please?" Sean hoped he looked serious enough for her to understand.

Thankfully, she listened, letting go and sliding off Glare's shoulders.

Sean stepped in front of Glare, trying to catch his eyes, but it didn't work. He was tracking something behind Sean instead— Sean glanced back.

"Did one of the kids do something?"

Glare shook his head. "*W.Y.A.T.T.*"

Sean glanced behind him again. "Hey Wyatt, can you come here for a sec?"

Wyatt ran to Sean's side, panting from ambushing Glare and subsequently running away. "What's up?"

Glare kept staring at the kid.

“Did you do something to my nice friend here?” Sean asked.

Wyatt shook his head. “His knee hit my face but I didn’t do anything. Is he alright?”

“O K ?” Glare signed.

Ah! Glare was worried he hurt Wyatt.

“Are you hurt?” Sean asked, looking at Wyatt’s face himself just to double check. No blood, no bruises yet, there wasn’t even a red mark.

Wyatt shook his head, grinning. “Can I go now? Matt said he was gonna try and steal from Ms. Isla and I really wanna see her yell at him!”

“Okay, just don’t be too mean!” Sean called, but the kid was already running away.

Sean clapped a hand on Glare’s shoulder. “See, he’s fine.”

Glare shook himself a little bit, and Sean started back down the path. It took him a couple of seconds to realize that Glare wasn’t following.

The guy was still standing there. Sean frowned.

“Are you okay?”

Glare turned to face him, hands shaking slightly as he pointed to Sean, said “*Trust*”, pointed to himself, and then gestured to where the kids had run off to.

“I trust you...” Sean tried to piece the message together, “oh, I trust you with the kids! Yeah, of course I do, why wouldn’t I?”

Glare didn’t have a response for Sean, just glancing down and back up again. He shook himself again and started following Sean.

That entire interaction confused Sean, but he got the feeling that Glare wasn’t able to explain himself, so Sean let it go.

“To the library!”

-

The sun was low in the sky, and Sean had almost completed his tour of the village. Isla’s? Check. Library? Check. The inn? Check. Attacked by small people? Not on the original list, but check.

Sean was wracking his brains to see if he missed something when he realized Glare wasn’t behind him anymore. Considering the last time that happened, Sean was obviously a little concerned.

He retraced his steps back to the farmer’s house they’d just stopped by. Sean called him a farmer, but he really was more of a rancher. There was a large paddock behind their house filled with cows and sheep, all used for milk and wool instead of their meat.

Glare had seemed interested, so they stopped by, and...

Yup, that's definitely where Sean had left him.

Sean turned the corner, ready to see Glare either frozen in fear or him wandering around looking for Sean, but he saw neither of those things. Instead, Glare had climbed inside the paddock, a feat Sean was surprised he could do with his twigs for arms, and was sitting on the ground.

He was next to a cow, one of the brown and fuzzy ones, that was laying down on the ground. Sean almost aww'ed out loud when he saw the cow's head resting in Glare's lap.

Glare was leaning in close like he was whispering, but signing instead. Sean couldn't catch half of the signs from this far away, especially since Glare kept interrupting them to run his hands through the cow's fur. He did catch enough of the word "*favorite*", finger-spelled—Sean should really start teaching him more—to realize what Glare was talking about.

He was telling the cow that it was his favorite animal.

Sean just stood there, soaking in a moment he knew Glare never would've let him see. The kid—and Sean should probably stop calling him that, considering they had to be just a year or two apart—was rarely vulnerable, or even soft, and it was nice to see that he could still act as young as he looked.

Not for the first time, Sean wondered what Glare would say if he could talk. Or if he'd say anything at all.

Sean waited for a few minutes, five at the most, just letting Glare have his moment. He seemed more content and at peace than Sean thought possible for a face so permanently marked with grimaces.

Unfortunately, the sun was getting closer to the horizon, and Sean wasn't going to let Glare walk home in the dark. He thought about offering Glare a bed for the night in his house, but immediately vetoed that idea. There was no way Glare would accept, and he seemed to have a weird thing about people offering him stuff. So no sleepover.

Which meant Sean had to backtrack and turn the corner again, this time loudly calling for Glare like he hadn't just been watching him.

Glare was standing and almost out of the paddock in seconds.

"Hey!" Sean called, "I lost you there for a minute."

"*Sorry.*" Glare did look genuinely sorry, a bit much for the situation, like he'd kicked Sean's non-existent dog instead of just getting distracted.

Sean just shrugged. "It's alright, maybe just tap my shoulder the next time you wanna stay and look at something."

Glare's hands and mouth twitched like he wanted to say something but couldn't do it in either language. Sean had noticed that a day or so ago— Glare's mouth would sometimes open like he was about to speak, but he'd stop before any sound came out. Sean figured that meant he used to talk, but couldn't anymore.

Glare always wore this green bandana around his neck, so it's not like Sean could check for any external injuries— but it wasn't his right in the first place. He needed to stop speculating.

Still, Glare was an odd guy.

"It's getting dark, so you should probably head home," Sean said, "See you tomorrow?"

Glare paused, thinking for a moment, before nodding.

"Here, lemme—" Sean cut himself off and raised his right hand up to his cheek. "Curl it like this, kinda like a claw, and—" he pulled his finger away. "That means tomorrow."

Glare repeated the sign and smiled. *"Tomorrow."*

"Exactly." Sean grinned. *"Tomorrow."*

Chapter End Notes

I didn't mean to go on a "break" or anything lmao, it just kinda happened over the holidays, but I'm glad to be writing again. More of this and some other (new!) things on the way!

Also I wrote and edited a good portion of this to the same 13 seconds of misery x cpr on loop, if you want to see my descent into madness its documented on twitter lol. I blame any mistakes in this on my slipping sanity

Feed me comments :O

ghost out of his grave

Chapter Summary

Something was wrong with Glare. It's a fact Sean should've realized, much, much sooner, but he was blinded by the joy of finding a friend.

Most people aren't mute but not deaf. Most people don't have scars on their hands and wear long clothes to cover the rest. Most people don't flinch at sudden movements. Most people don't freeze at random things. Most people don't act like Glare does, much less most kids.

Most people don't hurt themselves without realizing.

Except that's exactly what Glare had just done.

Chapter Notes

chapter title from Ghosting by Mother Mother (a personal fav)

shit's about to go down hee hee (not quite yet ;D)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“No, you’ve got to—” Sean lifted his hands again and repeated the sign. “Middle finger to thumb.”

Glare tried the sign— the letter J— again but reversed it, tracing his finger from his thumb to his middle finger instead of the other way around.

“Close, start with the middle finger,” Sean said.

Glare threw up his hands and got to his feet with more aggression than Sean knew he had. He paced the edge of the carrot farm for a few seconds, shaking his hands out like they were wet.

Sean just, sorta sat there, because he hadn't seen Glare angry yet and didn't know how to deal with it.

“Do you wanna take a break?” he tried.

Glare didn't even look at him.

Okay, so he wasn't in a talking mood, that was alright. Sean stood up, and it wasn't even a quick movement, but Glare flinched even with his back towards Sean. He kept doing that—flinching, that is. Sean had no idea why, it wasn't like Glare couldn't see him, so Sean wasn't startling him.

“Sorry, I didn't mean to—”

Glare was gone, practically running across the plains toward wherever his home was.

Great, so now Sean had scared him somehow. He was frustrated— not by Glare, but by himself. He was doing something wrong, something obvious, and he couldn't figure it out. There was something he was missing.

Sean sighed. Maybe tomorrow would be better.

-

Tomorrow wasn't better.

In fact, Glare didn't even show up.

Sean almost abandoned his chores for the day in favor of looking for him, but Isla managed to talk him out of it while he ordered bread for the week.

“He probably just needs some space, Sean,” Isla had said, “learning new things can be difficult. I’m sure he’ll be back.”

So Sean took her advice and got to work on the carrots.

It was quite lonely, harvesting them all by himself.

The sun set behind the horizon.

Sean went home.

-

“So I’m absolutely covered in mud, right,” Sean said, moving his hands dramatically to act out the story, “and the horse has the audacity to run away.”

Glare smiled, but it looked a bit hollow, just like every smile he’d had in the past few days. Sean had been telling stories and jokes to try and cheer him up, but Glare seemed to be stuck in a rut.

“Anyway, my dad found me wandering through the woods a few miles from home. He almost missed me cause I blended in with the trees.”

Glare tapped the side of his head twice, a shorthand they’d come up with for him to ask about signs.

“What, tree? Uh, I’m not actually sure,” Sean said, “We could check the book later.”

Glare shook his head and returned to farming.

Sean’s stomach clenched. He hadn’t signed in a while, so it wasn’t his fault he couldn’t remember some words, but it still felt like he did something wrong when Glare looked like that. Like someone punched his dog. And then spit on it.

“You sure? It’s no big deal.”

Again, Glare shook his head, this time refusing to look at Sean. He was trying to look busy with the carrots but kept fumbling the bag of fertilizer.

Sean didn’t push it.

-

They were on snack break sometime around noon, and Sean was mid-way through a story about his old pet bird when Glare stopped him. He leaned forward and reached for Sean’s face. Sean almost leaned backward reflexively but caught himself just in time for Glare to wipe a finger under his eyes.

Sean suddenly became aware of the tears in his eyes.

“Oh thanks, I didn’t realize I was crying,” Sean said, sniffing and wiping the rest away.

“O.K?”

“Yeah, I’m okay, I’m just made to be a crier.” Sean half-joked.

Glare nodded slightly. “*Sad?*”

Sean shrugged. “Sort of. My bird died a few years ago, and sometimes when I talk about it I get a little sad. It’s a good sad, you know?”

Glare looked like he definitely did not know.

“You, uh, don’t have to answer this, but have you had someone close to you die before?” Sean asked.

Glare nodded, looking down and away from Sean. He fiddled with the grass blades.

“I like to think they can hear us up there in heaven, anytime we mention their name or remember something of theirs. I’m sure they appreciate a happy story rather than something sad, and I’m also sure they’d want me to be happy. But, that doesn’t mean we aren’t allowed to be sad about their death, so I’m just both at the same time.”

Well, that wasn’t exactly the most poetic, but at least it got Sean’s point across.

Sean nudged Glare with his shoulder. “They’re probably looking down at you now.”

Glare looked up at the clouds, and although his face looked grim, Sean couldn’t see any tears.

“*G.O.O.D?*”

“Good? Like is it good that they’re watching us?”

Glare nodded.

“I think so. It’s always good to have someone watching over you. Besides, I think they’d be proud of everything I’ve done.” Sean smiled. “They’re probably proud of you too.”

Glare didn’t say anything. It was times like this when Sean would have traded his entire harvest and left hand to know what Glare was thinking. Who had he lost? Why was he apprehensive about the idea of an afterlife?

“I was raised Catholic,” Sean said, “but I know there are plenty of other religions out there. Most of them mention afterlives— actually, I met a wandering trader the other month who swore that ghosts were real. He said he had lunch with his great-great grandfather, can you believe that?”

Sean’s voice took on a teasing lilt, trying to lead Glare’s mind away from the grim idea of death towards something lighter.

Unfortunately, he seemed more upset, if that was possible. The fingers of his right hand were dancing on the back of his right, ghosting over scars and smears of dirt. Glare kept his eyes fixed on the ground.

Sean mentally face-palmed. God, talking with Glare felt like sweeping a field for TNT while blindfolded. Whatever he did, he always stepped on the block with the pressure plate.

Or was it him? Was Sean just that socially incompetent? Sure, he was raised in a fairly small village, but he wasn’t that sheltered, right?

He had Penny and his gram, and a few friends across the way he’d play with on Saturdays, and that was enough.

God, he missed his grandma.

What would she tell him right now? Something no-nonsense, surely.

Stop spiraling, Sean.

That sounds like her.

“Come on!” Sean clapped his hands. “Enough sad talk, these carrots need weeding and our daylight is running out fast!”

-

Something was wrong with Glare. It’s a fact Sean should’ve realized, much, much sooner, but he was blinded by the joy of finding a friend.

Most people aren’t mute but not deaf. Most people don’t have scars on their hands and wear long clothes to cover the rest. Most people don’t flinch at sudden movements. Most people don’t freeze at random things. Most people don’t act like Glare does, much less most kids.

Most people don’t hurt themselves without realizing.

Except that’s exactly what Glare had just done.

Sean had passed him a knife to cut a particularly tough root out of the ground, and a few seconds later there was red dripping onto the ground.

Glare was still working. He pulled the carrot out of the ground and moved onto the next, completely unaware of the blood spilling out of him at a rate Sean was not comfortable with.

“Uh, dude,” Sean said, voice wavering. Glare didn’t stop.

“Hey, hey, you’re *bleeding*.” Sean took the tool out of Glare’s hand and turned it so he could see the cut. Sean almost gagged at the sight of it. Wasn’t blood supposed to be dark? Glare’s was bright red, almost tomato, and, God, there was too much of it.

Glare seemed a little frozen again, so Sean ran to grab a piece of cloth from his bag that he normally used to wipe his hands but would do as a bandage in a pinch. As long as the cut didn’t get infected. Fingers crossed.

By the time he was back, Glare had torn a piece of fabric from his shirt— *he ripped his shirt!*-- and was wrapping the finger up with visible skill. He hadn’t even bothered to wipe away the blood running down his arm and onto his shirt.

What the heck?

Glare lifted his arm to his mouth, tying the bandage as he held it with his teeth, and in doing so caused his shirt to ride up. Normally this wouldn’t do much, considering Glare’s shirt was fairly long, but the new hem exposed a few inches of skin around his abdomen.

Sean felt like someone stabbed him with a shard of ice.

Scars were littered across Glare’s skin, more than Sean even thought could fit on one person. The edge of a burn, old bruises, little fresh cuts and old scabs, spotted discoloration that Sean couldn’t identify, a large chunk of scar tissue— too many. Sean couldn’t tear his eyes away.

And then Glare dropped his arm and they all disappeared.

Sean desperately grasped what little control he had left and tried to force his brain back into the present.

“Are you okay?” Sean asked. He felt a little dumb as he said it. Glare was obviously handling this better than him.

Glare gave him a thumbs up, one finger bandaged.

Sean held up his rag a little sadly. “You didn’t have to tear your shirt.”

Glare glanced down like he hadn’t even realized that’s what he had done and shrugged. There was just a hole in his shirt, and he was fine with it. He was gonna freeze in that thing!

Sean forgot what he had learned about Glare, forgot that he doesn’t like to be offered things, doesn’t like help, and stupidly opened his mouth.

“C’mon, let’s go get you a new shirt, I’ve got one you can use. And we need to clean your cut properly— and all that blood.” Sean was already bustling, grabbing the last few carrots they’d harvested and shoving them into a burlap bag.

When he looked up, Glare was gone.

Sean dropped the bag, the rush of adrenaline making him feel empty.

And all the pieces started to click.

God, he’d been such an *idiot*. A kid on the run, shy and jumpy, scars, mute, and thin. Sean was dumb. So, very, very dumb. His gram would be smacking him on the head and telling him to clean his eyes because they *obviously weren’t working*.

Glare had been abused.

That was the fact of the matter. He'd been abused, or, or imprisoned, or neglected— but then why would he flinch? All of the signs fit.

Sean had been hanging out with this guy for weeks, just happy to have a friend because he's such a naive *child*, and Glare had probably been suffering in silence. Literally.

Not even two hours ago Sean had caught him staring into the distance for almost ten minutes before he shook himself and got back to work.

Sean mindlessly packed up his farming tools. The sun was still high in the sky, there wasn't any practical reason why he needed to stop, but he just... couldn't. It wasn't as fun without Glare there to make a face at Sean when he started humming off-key or getting dirt everywhere.

What could he even do? What were you supposed to do when you figured out a kid was being abused? Tell an adult you trust, let them handle it, right? All that was to get them *out* of the abuse, which it seemed like Glare had already done, so—

Wait, Glare had already gotten out, right? He came to hang out with Sean all the time, there was no way someone abusive left him alone for that long.

But he never stayed the night, always went home before dark. He wasn't gaining any weight. He didn't come at all some days.

Abusers can be neglectful too.

Sean's stomach dropped. He just— he let Glare go home, and for all he knew, there was a maniac that beat kids waiting for Glare, and Sean just let that happen.

Shit.

-

Sean was pacing Isla's bakery floor back and forth.

"And what am I supposed to do?! He's not able to tell me if he's being hurt, and I don't want to follow him home like a creep! What if he's not even being abused, and he's just— I don't know, sleeping in a tree every night like a squirrel! Do I say something or will that make him scared? What if—"

Isla placed her hands on Sean's shoulders and held him still. "What you need to do is sit down, you're ruining my floors," she said.

"Sorry," Sean muttered, collapsing in an empty chair and letting his leg bounce up and down.

"Sean."

"What do you want me to do, *not* be upset about the fact that I've been a total idiot and let my friend get hurt?" Sean snapped.

Isla paused behind the counter. After a beat, she tossed her towel onto the counter and came back around to crouch in front of Sean.

"I've met him a few times now, and you aren't blaming me for not noticing," she said.

Sean dropped his head into his hands. "Yeah, but you haven't spent almost every day with him. Hours upon *hours*, Isla. He probably thinks I don't care, I've basically just been playing in the dirt with him."

"And think about how much that time must mean to that kid," Isla said, placing a calloused hand on Sean's cheek, "No matter what his situation is, you've made him happier and given him a place to be himself. That means a lot, Sean."

Sean sniffed, trying to keep the tears in his eyes at bay. “He’s so thin, Isla, and those scars...”

“Oh, sweetheart,” Isla murmured.

“I just don’t know what to do,” Sean whimpered.

Isla rubbed his arm reassuringly. “You’re a smart boy, Sean. I’ll give you my best advice, but the fact of the matter is that you know him best. You’re his friend, and he certainly trusts you more than anyone else in this village. You might have noticed how you’re the only person he’ll turn his back to.”

Sean had not.

“The point is that you’re doing your best,” Isla continued, “This isn’t a situation where one solution works for everyone. I trust you to make the decision that you think is right.”

Sean rubbed away the snot trickling out of his nose. “You seem to think an awful lot of me,” he joked.

Isla smiled. “I do.” She pulled him into a hug, awkward and full of limbs, but warm and sweet at the same time.

“We’ll make sure he’s safe, I promise.”

-

They were working on the newest harvest of carrots, and Sean was trying to figure out a way to approach the subject of abuse without scaring Glare off. It wasn’t exactly easy, considering Glare wasn’t a chatty guy and seemed to avoid anything Sean did to expand the conversation.

“You seem a little distracted today,” Sean hedged.

Glare shrugged.

“Is everything alright? Getting enough sleep?”

Again, Glare shrugged.

Sean internally sighed. Glare was a locked box today— Sean would have more luck stealing Isla’s secret carrot cake recipe she kept under her pillow at night than getting him to talk.

He dropped his trowel and looked up, making eye contact with Glare. “You know you can talk to me about anything.”

Glare paused and then slowly nodded his head. He looked serious, but honestly Sean had a difficult time reading Glare’s face.

“Okay,” Sean said, “okay.”

God, Sean just felt exhausted. He hadn’t slept that night just out of worry, and it was draining trying to pull a conversation out of Glare that they obviously didn’t want to have.

Penny got like that sometimes. Her deafness made it extremely easy for her to ignore something she didn’t want to hear— which was anytime Sean reprimanded her. It didn’t help that their parents tended to baby her. Any trouble she caused simply couldn’t be her fault, and why hadn’t Sean looked after her better, it’s his fault this happened.

Sean’s grandma always used to say that Sean was a saint for putting up with them. He could never tell if it was a joke or not until he got older and realized he was the wedge driven

between her and her daughter.

God, he missed his nan. Isla was wonderful, but Sean really wanted his grandma's advice right now. More than that, he wanted to be small enough again to crawl into her lap and fall asleep even with the sun high in the sky.

Not for the first time, Sean was reminded that he wasn't that much older than Glare. There was no way he was the best person for a job like this, but Isla had told him that trust was more important than age or experience, and Glare trusted him.

Sean didn't know if that was true. If it was, why wouldn't Glare talk to him?

He could feel his emotions building behind his eyes and down his throat, a bundle of confusion and anxiety. How was he supposed to help Glare when he could barely keep from crying while thinking about his grandma?

Sean had never been very good at keeping his emotions at bay, and while that wasn't necessarily a bad thing, as his nan always reminded him, it could be frustrating. Especially when your friend was maybe being abused and you needed to stay calm to help them.

Sean tossed his trowel onto the ground and groaned.

"You know what, let's call it a day early." The sun was already moving down in the sky, so it couldn't have been more than an hour or so earlier than they normally stopped, and Sean really needed to get to bed.

Glare simply nodded, so Sean pulled his last carrot out of the ground and gathered up his tools.

"See you tomorrow?"

“Tomorrow.”

Sean watched Glare head over the horizon, and a tiny bit of him still wanted to follow, but he didn't.

It was a silent and lonely walk back to Sean's house. It seemed like the kids were somewhere else for the day, and no one was out and about to say hello. Probably for the best, Sean could feel his eyes drooping with every step.

He took his nightly routine a little slower than normal, savoring his dinner and scrubbing his tools twice over. Routines were good, routines made him calm.

The sun was starting to set when Sean finally decided to head to bed.

He had just pulled out his sleep clothes when there came a knock at his door. Sean groaned.

“Coming!”

He pulled open the door, expecting Isla or some of the kids waiting with a prank. Instead, little Colin was standing alone with a frightened look on his face.

“Jill's hurt! And I think the new guy is too!” he squeaked.

Sean started running.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter is dedicated to the banger spotify weekly I got last week and the writing club at my college (which is called the Syndicate. Yes I am unreasonably geeking out

about that lol). Who knew spending a whole hour reading people's writing could be so inspiring? That was a joke. I knew that. I should have joined earlier lmao.

This semester has gone surprisingly well so far? I sorta feel like I have my shit together. I think it may be the fact that i have an alarm set for every meal of the day so i dont forget. Who knew properly feeding yourself could be so helpful? Again, that was a joke. Everyone knows that. I am a dumbass /affectionate.

Anyway, I've got some other stuff cooking, but apparently our magazine submission are due in like less than two weeks so I might work on something for that first. (I also still need to edit Vibes for my mom to read whoops). I'm pretty excited to write the next chapter of this for obvious reasons, so really who knows? That wasn't a joke this time. I actually don't know. I have no schedule ever. We've established this in the paragraph I said I needed alarms for meals. Keep up. I don't know what hellscape this author's note has devolved into but I should stop. Comments are my fuel <333333

the self is not so weightless

Chapter Summary

“We found him!” someone shouted, running into the town square.

Sean scrambled to his feet, ready to help Glare’s injuries and calm him down, but there was no one else with the person.

“Where is he?” he asked, almost incredulous.

The person tossed off their helmet, sweaty hair sticking to their forehead. Sean recognized them as Matt, a fisherman across town he’d only spoken to a few times.

“He’s by the lava pool.”

Chapter Notes

I almost cried like eight times while writing this, ngl, so good luck o7

chapter title from achilles come down by gang of youths (i mean what else was it gonna be)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Colin dashed after him, wheezing slightly but still talking. “I’m so sorry, Sean, we didn’t know—”

Sean cut him off. “What happened?”

They turned a corner, Colin almost falling flat on his face.

“We were bored and we saw the new guy leaving the village so we followed him to find his house, but Sean, I *promise* we weren’t trying to scare him but I think a monster must have got him ‘cause he was already bleeding and he pushed Jill and— and he just threw his armor down and ran, and it’s starting to get dark, and we can’t find him!”

It took Sean a moment to process everything in Colin's quick ramblings, but the words sunk in.

"Where is Jill right now?"

"Town center, her parents are there— everyone is! Isla's got people out looking, she's the one who told me to get you."

Thank God for Isla. Sean made a mental note to give her a discount on carrots for the rest of his life.

The streets opened up, and they ran into the town square. A group of people were by Isla listening to something she was saying, but Sean interrupted it by almost colliding with her and huffing out, "Have you found him yet?"

Isla grabbed his arm to keep him upright and steadied him. "No, but we're looking."

"What about—"

"Jill is fine, she's just got a few scrapes and cuts, nothing worse than she's had before. She's right over there if you want to talk to her." Isla pointed across the way.

Jill was sitting on her mom's lap talking animatedly with her hands and barely even wincing as her dad cleaned her injuries and covered them with bandages. Her mom was rolling her eyes at whatever Jill was saying. Neither of them looked worried in the slightest.

Sean made his way over. As soon as Jill saw him she started apologizing profusely, just like Colin.

“Sean! I didn’t mean to, I swear, we thought we could prank him but he looked so *scared!*”

“It’s alright, Jill,” Sean said, even though it really wasn’t. “I’m sure your parents will lecture you about following people around, but I’m really just worried about Glare right now.”

She frowned. “Glare?”

Oh, right. “That’s what I call the new guy, it’s a nickname.”

Jill nodded. “Cause he can’t tell you his real name.”

“Well…” Sean’s heart clenched. Glare knew the alphabet well enough to tell Sean his name, or he could’ve just written it. They’d known each other for weeks, and Sean still didn’t know his actual name.

Had he not made him feel safe enough?

Sean shook the thoughts away—he could wallow in his feelings later, right now he had a mission.

“I need you to tell me exactly what happened,” he said, “Colin said it looked like he got attacked by a monster.”

Jill shook her head. “Colin said that ‘cause he wanted to save him from a zombie. It didn’t look like any monster attack I’ve seen.” She looked down, losing a bit of her energy. “It looked really painful.”

Sean felt what was left of his stomach drop to the ground. “Where was he hurt?”

“His arms. There were red lines all up and down.”

“Up and down? They weren’t horizontal?” Sean asked.

“No,” Jill said, obviously not knowing how much a relief that was to hear. “Oh! And his hands! He ripped his armor off before he ran and it cut his hands all up.”

Sean started putting the details together in his head. “And he just ran?”

Jill nodded. “He threw his sword away and took off his armor, and then he was gone. We tried to tell him to stop but he was so fast, Sean, I think he could beat even you in a race.”

“And you have—”

“We found him!” someone shouted, running into the town square.

Sean scrambled to his feet, ready to help Glare’s injuries and calm him down, but there was no one else with the person.

“Where is he?” he asked, almost incredulous.

The person tossed off their helmet, sweaty hair sticking to their forehead. Sean recognized them as Matt, a fisherman across town he’d only spoken to a few times.

“He’s by the lava pool.”

Oh God.

Sean felt like he was going to throw up.

“Is he—”

“He’s close enough to the edge that I was worried about spooking him, so I came back, but it’s getting dark quickly, and I’m not sure if you’ll be able to get him and bring him back before monsters spawn.”

Sean was extremely close to freaking out. Extremely, *extremely* close. But someone’s life was in his hands, and he couldn’t let them down. Not again.

He took a deep breath.

In, and out.

“Tell everyone to gather whatever healing supplies they have and leave them in my house. Those who don’t should follow me to the pool and light the way with torches. Try and keep everyone out of the way when we get back. Got it?”

Matt nodded.

“Okay. Let’s go.”

-

Glare— Glare was sitting by the edge of the lava pool. Sean could feel his heart beating without even touching his chest. It was knocking against his ribs, desperately reminding him that he was alive and that could change any second.

It might change for the person in front of him.

Sean approached the pool from a wide angle, trying to approach in a way that wouldn't scare Glare. It didn't seem to work— Glare flinched away.

Glare's hands were dug into the ground like it was his lifeline, and in a way, it was. If he let go of the grass, there would be nothing stopping him from tipping forward into the lava. Sean didn't have a potion of fire resistance— he wasn't rich, no one in the village was. The lava would mean death.

Sean was pretty sure that's what Glare wanted.

He settled himself down by the lava pool, trying to portray a sense of relaxation, but the heat was almost unbearable, and Sean was sure he was moments away from a breakdown of his own.

"Jill's alright— they all are. It's just a scratch, and she's already bragging about the scar she'll have."

That was a good place to start, right? Glare felt guilty about hurting Jill, that much was obvious. If he froze after kneeing Wyatt, it wasn't exactly far-fetched to do... this after almost stabbing Jill. Almost. No one got stabbed, thank God.

Sean's words didn't seem to relax Glare. Instead, he froze up even more. Okay, new tactic. He could do this. He could do this.

"No one's mad at you. The kids shouldn't have followed you, they know better than to invade someone's privacy," Sean said.

Again, Glare just tensed more.

Distantly, Sean knew he was shaking. He knew his voice was cracking and unsure, and he knew he was seconds away from crying. He wasn't prepared for this, it all felt so out of the blue, but it made so much sense— Glare had shown all the warning signs, but Sean just didn't think he could handle this.

Glare kept looking at the lava like it was an old friend, and the light exaggerated all the pockmarks and scars in his face, and *God*, there were too many of them.

Sean felt like he had stepped into a creek just to dip his toes in and ended up swimming in a stormy ocean.

He needed to get a grip on himself. Glare was depending on him, he would have time to freak out later.

Just breathe, in and out.

Glare was crying. He was silent— not even a whimper, but his face was twisted into something that toed the line between pain and grief.

“You're still upset,” Sean said, hoping Glare would do something other than stare into the lava.

He didn't.

God, what was he supposed to do?

“I can't help unless you communicate,” he said, almost begging.

At that, Glare's mouth moved. It took a few seconds but Sean realized he was saying “*I can't.*”

What?

Glare's fingers twitched, drawing Sean's eyes. He gasped— Glare was still bleeding, and there was enough to coat the grass he was holding on to.

“You're bleeding,” Sean said, and mentally smacked himself the second it came out.

Glare's hands twitched again. Sean tried to see the injuries, but Glare's hold was just too tight. In fact, every second or so the muscles around his fingers seized like Sean's calf did when he ran a little too hard.

It hit Sean— Glare was stuck. Whatever was happening to his hands kept him from letting go.

From tipping into the lava.

Sean was willing to bet it was the *only* thing keeping him from doing such a thing.

“You have to focus on me right now, can you do that?” Sean asked, voice cracking slightly. He could feel tears building in his eyes and clogging his throat, but refused to let them fall.

He was way out of his depth.

Okay, okay. He could do this. He could do anything he put his mind to, that's what his gran always said. Sure, she was talking about the village archery contest, but it still counted, right? Sean won that contest, and then when he wanted to leave and start a new life, he did that too.

Deep breaths.

“I need a response.” He tried to keep his voice strong and unwavering— a rock in the deep waves.

Glare said nothing.

Sean scooched just a little closer, still not close enough to reach Glare, but maybe close enough to pull him out if— He didn’t want to think about what that would entail.

The second Sean moved, Glare’s whole body tensed even further. Sean stilled, settling just slightly so not to spook him further.

“Hey, you have to look at me,” Sean said, hoping if he got Glare’s attention off the lava that he would back up.

Glare looked up, *thank God*.

Sean made a mental note to pray when he— when they got home. It’d been too long, and if all went well, he was gonna have a lot to be thankful for.

Glare looked... Sean wasn’t sure if he had seen such a painful expression on someone before. It felt like someone had stripped away all the walls Glare kept up constantly and revealed the weeping, agonizing wound of his soul.

Sean couldn’t even describe the sensations pulsing through him. His heart felt like someone had their fist around it, his stomach filled with rocks, his lungs hollowed out, his skin torn between burning this close to the lava or freezing in the night breeze.

It was as if someone had taken the emotions swirling around inside of him, every single chaotic one, and let them loose on his physical body. His nerves were on fire.

Keep breathing.

“Good, that’s great,” Sean said, and it felt almost like a whisper, “Can you move your hands?” He expected the answer to be no, but he needed to be sure.

Glare shook his head.

“Alright, that’s fine, that’s—” *breathe* “—that’s fine. Can you move at all?”

Another no.

POP!

Sean jumped, turning his head just in time to see a large bubble break through the surface of the lava.

Glare had turned back to the lava. Sean’s heart kicked up another notch.

“Hey, hey, eyes back on me.”

Glare looked back at Sean, but the damage was already done. Sean was properly freaking out now, shaky breaths and burning tears. It was taking everything in him to not lunge and push Glare out of the way, but he couldn’t. He needed to do this properly, and there was no way Sean was going to break what little trust Glare had gifted him.

“We’re going to stay here until you can move, okay?” It was a promise not only to Glare but to himself. “And then we’ll head back to my house, or— or yours, that’s fine, and I’ll teach you some animal signs. We can start with cow! How does that sound?”

Sean thought back to the Glare that had sat with cows and smiled, who had signed to them despite barely knowing any words. He *desperately* wanted that Glare.

Glare shook his head.

Sean swallowed hard. “Alright, we can learn something else. Flowers, maybe? Or you can just head to bed, it’s been a long day.”

There was no response. In fact, if Sean didn’t know Glare wasn’t deaf, he would have assumed so by the blank look in his eyes. Nothing Sean was saying was registering.

It was silent around them, broken occasionally by the crackling of lava or chirping of cicadas. Sean could hear his heartbeat in his ears.

There was nothing to indicate Glare was still alive except for the shallow rise and fall of his chest.

Sean wondered if he was already gone.

“Hey, you’re zoning out,” he said, and he could hear the tears in his voice. They had long since fallen.

Glare jumped just slightly, more movement that Sean had seen since he showed up at the pool. In fact, Glare’s fingers were wiggling.

Glare’s fingers were wiggling.

Something in Sean broke.

“What do you say?” he rambled, “I can make some carrot soup, put our harvest to good use, right?”

Glare looked back at the lava.

“Hey, no, no, don’t do that.” Sean was trembling, and he really, really wanted someone there next to him. Isla, his gran, even his mom. Penny. Just someone to give him a hug and tell him everything would be okay.

Sean had never seen anyone die before, not a proper canon death. He’d been visiting his gran when Penny was born and immediately lost a life to the oxygen deprivation before the doctors could revive her. Years later, his parents wouldn’t let him into the room when the sickness ate away at her last two.

He’d been to funerals before— the old man down the street’s, his grandfather’s, Penny’s. No one let him look in the casket before it was lowered into the ground. Sean had never seen a dead body.

He was terrified he might.

Even if Glare had more than life— which Sean highly doubted, some of the scars that Glare had were not injuries people tended to survive— there was nothing stopping him from doing this again and again.

“Please look at me, that’s all I want, okay. We can sit here for as long as you want, I won’t leave, I promise. We can look up at the stars, I can tell you stories my gran always used to tell, anything you want.” *Please, just not that.*

Glare said nothing, didn’t turn. Sean wondered if he was even listening.

“We’ve got a fresh harvest of carrots tomorrow, I’m gonna need your—” Sean’s voice broke, a sob working its way out of his throat “—your help with that. And Isla’s baking this

delicious cinnamon bread for Gillian's birthday, she lives just down the street. I'm sure she'd let you have a piece if you asked."

Sean couldn't breathe.

Glare flexed his hands and let go of the grass.

"Hey, please, Glare, you don't have to— just take a step back. Please— for the love of God, please just look at me. Please, please, don't—"

Glare turned away from the lava and looked Sean in the eyes. Sean thought he might just collapse then and there.

"I don't know what happened to you, but I can promise you, it's not gonna happen again. I don't care if someone hurt you or you hurt someone, or both, or whatever, but I swear to God you're safe here."

Sean had never meant anything more in his life. If Glare's abuser showed up— if he even had one, which Sean was starting to doubt— Sean would meet them with iron and fire. He would lay down his life for his friend, and God, wasn't that a terrifying thought? That Sean would give up all that, and it meant nothing if Glare just leaned forward.

"Whatever is making you feel this way, it's not going to be that way forever. There are people that can help— I want to help, if you'll let me," he said, pushing every bit of sincerity and love into his voice.

Glare lifted his hands and signed, "*Help.*"

Sean let out a breath, sobbed, really. "Help, yes— yes, I can help. Do you want me to help you?"

Glare nodded and repeated the sign.

“Alright, is it okay if I move?”

“Yes.”

Sean stood and crept forward slowly. There were so many thoughts and emotions rushing through him, but, somehow, they all felt secondary to what was in front of him.

“Can I touch you?”

Another yes.

Sean reached out and gripped Glare’s hands, quickly moving to grasp his forearms. He lifted Glare up practically on his own— *why was he so light?*— and turned them away from the lava.

It felt like Sean could breathe again. His eyes felt burned from staring into the lava so long, and his legs were shaky and unstable, but they were okay. Everything was gonna be okay.

Glare stumbled, so Sean wrapped his arms around him to keep him steady. They made their way back like that, pressed together in one unit.

The villagers did exactly as he’d asked, clearing the streets and keeping quiet. Glare still seemed quite tense, and Sean wanted to get him back home without any surprises or scares.

As Sean stepped onto his porch he realized he never actually asked Glare where he wanted to go, but Glare nodded, so he led them inside.

The lanterns inside were all freshly lit, providing a warm, comforting glow to Sean's already cozy home. A collection of potions, bandages, and even magma cream were on the table. He added Matt to his list of people to give a carrot discount to.

Sean sat Glare down in a chair by the kitchen table. Wasting no time, Sean started pouring healing potions onto the bandages and wrapping Glare's hands. The cuts were fairly deep but nothing that wouldn't be fixed in a few weeks. Glare would have a scar, but Sean figured he wasn't really concerned about that, considering the mosaic already covering his skin.

The injuries on Glare's arms looked minor, not even bleeding, but Sean could understand why Jill thought it looked scary. Sean was pretty sure Glare had scratched at his arms long enough to start tearing at the skin, leaving it red and angry. Sean decided to let the marks be for the night.

They didn't need the magma cream.

As soon as Sean was done, Glare was quick to grab his hands and squeeze. Sean let out a long breath and tried to envision it melting away his stress. His hands were still slightly shaking, but it felt less like his heart was going to quit and more like he'd just witnessed Penny do something stupidly dangerous.

Sean dropped his head onto the joined hands, just focusing on his breathing. "Please don't do that again."

He knew it was selfish to ask, but he didn't think he could go through that again.

Glare squeezed his hands again, and Sean just let out another shaky breath.

Everything was starting to catch up with him. Glare had— Glare had almost killed himself. Sean stopped him. He actually talked him down.

Glare was going to kill himself. Tears pricked in Sean's eyes again, painful and hot. Something had happened to Glare that made him feel like death was the only option, something that Sean didn't even know anything about.

Sean had almost failed another person in his life.

Glare's hands twitched, so Sean looked up, immediately seeing a clear look of guilt written across Glare's face.

"Stop that," he said.

Glare raised an eyebrow.

"You're thinking loudly. I can hear you blaming yourself up there." Okay, Sean was being a little bit of a hypocrite, but, well— sue him. He grabbed a regen potion off the table and gave it to Glare. The effects only covered physical health, not mental, but it wasn't like he didn't need help in the first category.

Glare popped the cork and started drinking.

"I'm glad I was there. Prime, when the kids came running back to the village and told us what happened... I— I don't know what I thought, but I'm glad I found you."

"Help," Glare said, *"thank you."*

"You're welcome, dude, any time— and I mean that quite literally. I would rather you come to me with anything that's upsetting you even if you think you're bothering me." *Please, just come to me first next time.*

Glare kept signing, this time using the alphabet, and Sean strung together the letters.

T. O. M. M. Y

Oh. *Oh!*

Glare— no, *Tommy* smiled at him.

“Tommy,” Sean said, feeling the name in his mouth, “Your name is Tommy.”

Tommy nodded.

Sean felt like he’d been given emotional whiplash. He stuck out his hand, straight and proper like his mom taught him, and said, “Nice to meet you properly, Tommy, I’m Sean.”

-

Sean waited until Tommy was fully asleep to sneak out of bed. He grabbed his quilt, wrapping it around his shoulders, and tip-toed outside.

His porch was too small for a chair, so Sean sat on the steps and looked out across the village. If he squinted, he could see a trail of torches fading into the distance.

Finally, Sean let his tears drip off his cheeks. He clenched his hand in a fist and covered his mouth, quietly sobbing into it.

His breath kept hitching, and his chest kept shaking until he was truly, properly crying, the kind that just keeps coming and there’s no stopping it. Sean let it course through him, let the grief and the fear choke him. He cried for Tommy, for whatever had happened to him. He cried for Penny, for a second chance. He cried for himself.

Sean managed to calm down slightly, just enough to even his breathing out, but one look at his still trembling hands sent him back to crying.

God, it was just... so *much*. Is this what Tommy felt like every day, every hour? He couldn't imagine. It wasn't difficult to imagine the allure of death if this was what life brought.

Sean pulled the quilt tight around him, trying to imagine it as his family and church hugging him. He had never felt more loved than when he was in their arms.

Sean wondered if Penny was watching him from above. He closed his eyes, imagining her sitting beside him. She would have dropped her head onto his shoulder and wrapped herself around his arm, always eager to cuddle.

"You're a good friend," she would have said.

Sean pressed his head into the quilt and let his tears soak the fabric.

Eventually, the sobs subsided. The tears ran out, and the shaking changed to trembling which in turn changed to stillness.

Sean clasped his hands together and took one last deep breath.

"Our father, who art in heaven, hallowed be..."

Chapter End Notes

this was written entirely to my saddest playlist on loop lmao. last goodbyes by derivikat came on and it felt like someone punched me in the throat.

this took a little bit longer than I anticipated, but I have now edited the first eight chapters of vibrations! ive marked the edit dates in the beginning note for future

reference btw

I hope you enjoyed <3 all tears will be collected and added to my tear jar, thank you for your contribution /j

End Notes

Follow me on twitter [@celest_warden](https://twitter.com/celest_warden)

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!